

Ten Tips on Getting the Most out of CRS Speakers

By Joe Hastings, CRS West Regional Office

Speakers from CRS bring a great message to American Catholics that people overseas are grateful for the tremendous help they receive and want to join them in creating a world of peace and dignity for all. A speaker truly helps to build global solidarity by putting a human face on our brothers and sisters around the globe. In my own work with at least a dozen CRS staff on speaking tours in the West, I have consistently found inspiration from their companionship, their stories, and their presence to every parish and school they visit. But, here's a fact not to be missed: CRS Speakers come to the US not only to help CRS. They also *strengthen social ministry in your diocese*. Their presence can help your ministry as a CRS Diocesan Director if you take the steps to get the most benefit out of their visit. With a nod to David Letterman, here are "Ten Tips on Getting the Most out of CRS Speakers."

1. Contact your [regional office](#) and let them know that you are interested in a CRS Speaker coming to your diocese. Find out when the next speaker is scheduled to be in your region.
2. Once you have dates for a speaker, start thinking about *where you want the speaker to go* in your diocese. It's likely they will only be in your diocese two to four days. Connect their time to promoting participation in CRS programs. Is there a parish or school that has faithfully participated in Operation Rice Bowl that you want to appreciate? Is there a newly-participating parish or school that you want the speaker to encourage?
3. Think about events: Is there a diocesan gathering or conference which the speaker could address? Is there a parish willing to have them speak at the masses? Would some JustFaith groups be willing to come together? Is there a school which is having an assembly?
4. Think about key leaders: Is there a gathering of school principals? Catechists? An ongoing formation day for deacons or priests?
5. Once the major anchors of the speakers' schedule are set, smaller events and appointments can fill out the schedule, without overcrowding it: , a meeting with the bishop to thank him for his support, a brown bag lunch at the Chancery, addressing the diocesan Global Solidarity Committee or CRS Committee.
6. Arrange an interview with the diocesan newspaper, radio or television program, and accompany the speaker to the interview. Make sure the reporter knows that the CRS Speaker is here to thank local Catholics for their support, that the solidarity and support of local parishes and schools makes possible the work of CRS around the world.
7. CRS will create an educational handout to accompany the speaker. Make sure teachers and parish educators have this handout in their hands and have a plan to use it. Do teachers know about the CRS Education site at <http://education.crs.org> ?
8. CRS Speakers will generally conclude each presentation with a question to engage the audience: "What can YOU do in response to what you heard today?" Handouts that accompany the tour will suggest answers, but you might have suggestions as well. Make sure local hosts allow time for parishioners or students to discuss their action in response to the speaker's inspiration.
9. After the tour, make time for follow up! This step is crucial! Contact the parishes and schools and get their feedback: Was the speaker helpful to their ministry or curriculum? Did logistics go smoothly? Would they recommend a speaker to other parishes or schools? Urge their community to make a concrete response to the speaker: Will they strive to increase the participation in Operation Rice Bowl this coming Lent? Will their youth group do Food Fast this year? Will the community make the switch to Fair Trade coffee or hold a Work of Human Hands sale? Thank media contacts who ran a story on the speaker.
10. Many speakers will invite you to visit them in their home countries. Great! Let your CRS Regional Office know that you are interested in an immersion trip to see firsthand the work of CRS overseas!

In all of these ways, the CRS Speaker increases the visibility of social ministry in the diocese, emphasizes that parishes and schools are providing real, effective help to those in need, builds a broader understanding of global solidarity and its connection to our faith, and encourages social ministry leaders. Speakers are not just "publicity" or "awareness" for CRS. They are a significant part of religious education, which Pope Benedict wrote about in his recent World Day of Peace Message: *...religious education is the highway which leads new generations to see others as their brothers and sisters, with whom they are called to journey and work together so that all will feel that they are living members of the one human family...* [No.4].